Ambassador of the Month – PalmettoBling

Community Mister Taxel Jun 3, 2019

Ambassador of the Month—PalmettoBling

June is here, Xbox Ambassadors! That means we've got a new Ambassador of the Month to highlight—PalmettoBling! As an active Ambassador, community evangelist, and overall friendly gamer, he sets a great example for what it means to be an Xbox Ambassador. Take a few minutes to learn more about his journey below and say congrats if you see him around!

Can you tell us a bit about your gaming journey? How did you get started, and what is your favorite game of all time?

My dad was always into new technology and computers, so I was very lucky that I had the opportunity to tinker around with new computers from a young age. I distinctly remember sitting in our living room as a kid while my dad taught me how to boot to a floppy disk, so I could play the game "Tapper" and then teach me about how to load programs into High Memory in DOS to free up memory if I wanted to run other programs and games. I was primarily a PC gamer for a long time, with a few favorites of Wolfenstein 3D, DOOM, Star Trek: 25th Anniversary, and Space Cadet Pinball built into Windows 95. I had a few consoles like an Atari 2600 and SEGA Genesis. I even rented a N64 from a Blockbuster once; that was weird. I got an original

Xbox after my first year at college but didn't get to play it much before I joined the Army.

It was my time in the Army, though, that really set me as an Xbox gamer for life. I was deployed to Iraq for 18 months across 2007 and 2008. It sounded like a long time on paper when the orders came down, but in practice? It was much longer. We were responsible for establishing and maintaining long range backbone communications between sites, so I had soldiers spread out across the north and west of the country. Now, as a compassionate human being, I know from experience that a person can only watch 2007's Transformers so many times before they will completely lose their mind, so I had to do something to help with our squad's morale. When I was on one of the larger bases, I was lucky enough to buy an Xbox 360 and Halo 3 bundle. I picked up a padded backpack and extra controllers and I took it with me when I went around on my regular check-ins with the rest of the squad at the different sites.

Hours upon hours were spent with my squad, strangers, superiors, officers, enlisted, civilians; it didn't matter. It allowed us to relax and decompress, even if only for a moment, and forget where we were when playing that 360. At some of the larger sites I worked with the USO and set up base tournaments of Halo 3 for all the soldiers, I also ran a rat nests of CAT-5 cables linking Xbox-to-Xbox from tent-to-tent. Some bases were a lot smaller, though, and the 360 allowed me to just sit, talk, and listen with my soldiers and, I hope, provide them a little bit of home.

Charles Dickens was right, because it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It's something I still look back on and think fondly despite the circumstances. It's given me great memories to remember my friends now at home across the world, as well as those that didn't make it back. I will never forget them and the time I had with them. I've owned countless Xbox consoles since, and always try and catch a game with my old battle buddies to just talk and remember.

Although I will always have a special place in my heart for Halo 3, my favorite games of all time would have to be the Titanfall games. Respawn, born out of Infinity Ward after Modern Warfare, make games that are just *fun*. The shooting in the game is great, but the movement they add in has a beautiful grace and flow that I just love to come back to.

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How did you find your way to the Xbox Ambassadors Program, and what's your favorite part about the program as it stands today?

I remember reading about the Xbox Ambassador program a long time ago and signed up in 2013 or so. It was a very different program then, and I didn't put much time into it. Years later, in 2016 or so, I was reminded about it from a post on Twitter, and that led me to check back in on the program. This time it stuck, and that is in large part of the hard work of the first Xbox Ambassador Alphas who built the community bedrock and made it a welcoming place. I realize that was part of why I fell off before; Internet communications and shared spaces have come along way and with the addition of the Xbox Ambassadors lounge chat room (pre-Discord) it was a place to hang out and get to know each other that wasn't there before. That one piece, the human component, is what has kept me coming back, contributing, hanging out, and helping.

I have built my career of fixing technological problems, and darn if I don't enjoy it. I like how I feel when I help someone solve an issue they are having with their Xbox, or have a question about Microsoft Family Accounts, or want to figure out how to do something new, and it helps that I'm good at it. But it's truly the people I've met here that is my favorite part and why I'm proud and happy to be here.

Outside of being an Xbox Ambassador, how do you stay involved in the wider Xbox community?

I went to a boarding school for high school. Add that in with college and the Army, and I have close friends spread out across the world, so my Xbox friends list always has someone online and playing something. I love having Xbox as a place where we can get together and talk to each other and keep in touch, as well as catch a game of something here or there.

I also follow a lot of Ambassadors on Twitter and I love to see the new things they are trying. I feel like the Ambassador program is inspirational to get our members to try new things. Watching them reach out in to new areas, experiment, and learn, is a real treat, and I love to support those new ventures.

Can you tell us a bit about Xbox Playdates US? Where can Ambassadors get info about what you're doing and playing?

Xbox Playdates has groups across different regions that set weekly games to allow the Xbox Community at large to join in and play in a fun, no judgement atmosphere. We pick popular multiplayer games, so we can get as many people to join in with us each week.

I started playing with them about two years ago because it's an awesome group of people (even before I joined) and I've always had a blast. As a parent, I have a limited window of when I get to play games, so Playdates has been a great way for me to have a dedicated group I can play with regularly and try games online that I normally would have missed out on, like OnRush. I was honored that they asked me to join the team last October and been doing what I can to help keep it welcoming, safe, fun, and growing ever since!

Xbox Playdates has a Discord server we use across all the Playdates teams, so even if you aren't in the U.S., there is likely a team that plays for a timeslot that works for you, and we would love to see you join here: https://discord.gg/Z47wWft. You can also follow us on Twitter at @XboxPlaydatesUS and on Facebook.

We play on Tuesdays at 9 PM Eastern/6 PM Pacific and Saturday at 8PM Eastern/5 Pacific every week and stream at Mixer.com/XboxPlaydatesUS. Each month we pick one game we play on every Tuesday of the month and a different game for each Saturday. We keep our schedule up to date on the Discord server, so plan on joining in with us! We'd love to have you.

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You recently put on a presentation to other parents in your local PTA. Can you give a high-level description of what you were presenting on, and why it's important to you specifically?

Being a parent has always been hard, and these days with technology and the internet as it is, it can be extremely difficult to have an idea of what kids are up to, how they are behaving, and what they're seeing. I have two wonderful kids, and I wanted to use my knowledge and experience to let my community and school know that I'm a resource available for questions they might have around video gaming, online safety and privacy, and how to safeguard their children online while also teaching them that behavior online matters.

I wanted to let them know that it can be good to limit your child's screen time, so they can get outside, run around, exercise, and be healthy, but that there are different experiences that can happen online with games as well. I wouldn't want my child playing Toon Blast or Candy Crush for hours by themselves, but I recognize that if they're playing on a Minecraft server with friends, building, talking, and engineering, that is different and socially engaging, and I would be less inclined to limit that time.

It's a tough balance to let them explore and learn online while still doing what I can to keep them safe. I wanted to do this, not just for my children, but help others prepare their kids and help educate the parents on what they can do and what tools they have available to help guide and protect them. The PTA was a great organization to work with to further reach out into my community and give back.

For other Ambassador parents out there – what's the best one piece of advice you'd give for keeping their kids safe online?

There are so many things you need to do to be safe online, let alone for children, but the best piece of advice I can give for children, and this goes beyond games and online, would be to talk to just your kids openly and honestly. That open honesty, I feel, goes both ways, and I'm confident that my children know they can come to me with anything. I explain the dangers of "tricky people" that might lie or cheat to do mean things and they can let me know if they encounter anything they're worried about.

Also, use the tools at your disposal. Protect your and your family's accounts with two-factor authentication. Use a password manager and don't use the same password twice. Establish rules and screen times to keep an eye on how much and when they're playing. Secure your purchase options to require a PIN your children don't know on all devices. And that's not just for kids, that's for everyone's security.

Give us a bit of context into you as a person outside of gaming. What's your favorite way to spend non-gaming time, and why?

Outside of gaming, I love to go hiking and camping with my family. We've visited over 75% of all the state parks in South Carolina and spent many weekends in the Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina. I think keeping a balance of indoor and outdoor activities is important in maintaining your health, both physical and mental.

I also like to read Science Fiction novels, a lot. Any kind of sci-fi. From the high concept allegory of the human condition science fiction like Octavia Butler's Lilith's Brood books down to the real pulpy airport bookstore quality science fiction like John DeChancie's space-trucker series Skyway.

Additionally, I have a group of friends who get together each week to play board and table-top games. We'll play all sorts of things, and vary it up, depending on who is available in the party that week if we continue our Dungeons & Dragons campaign or play great boardgames like Mysterium, Secret Hitler, or Azul. My children also love boardgames. Luckily, they've outgrown Candyland, because that game is terrible, and they have moved on to better pastures like Catan and Ticket to Ride.

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What advice would you give to brand new Xbox Ambassadors looking for ways to make their own awesome impact on the Xbox community?

My first recommendation is to understand the troubleshooting process. When someone has an issue, ruling out what the problem ISN'T can be just as helpful as identifying what the problem IS. Think about the problem, and what along the path to that problem that could be the issue, and narrow down what can be tried to troubleshoot, and then fix the issue.

Sure, a full power-cycle of the console solves a lot of the issues but providing a copy/paste answer is impersonal and doesn't give the person having the issue, who is often frustrated, any feeling that you're trying to help, and can simply add to their frustration. Don't just provide answers or links, make it a

conversation because it’s a human being on the other end. Engage with them and make our community, Ambassador and Xbox-wide, a better place for everyone.

Woohoo, PalmettoBling!

We’re very happy to have him as part of our community! Give him a shout out in the comments below or shoot him a ‘congrats” if you see him around!

Want to nominate an Ambassador of the Month? Submit your nomination using this link.